

Emerging Technology: A Loss of Remembrance

Over the last fifty years, technology has accelerated from a walk to lightning speed. Many people find it difficult to keep up with its pace, and yet it keeps moving faster. Fifty years ago the only locations to receive information were libraries, newspapers, and, for the select few, televisions. Today, if one wants to know how a football team is doing, that person can turn to their cell phone while walking down the street and receive that information in less than a minute. No longer do people have to wait until the next day to find out what happened the day before. Online news and television news replaces newspapers printed the next day. These emerging technologies have affected the way people perceive information and how that information is interpreted.

Information is an important idea in the structuring of this nation. It is what has made us advance so much faster than other countries. By allowing every individual access to all information, we have crossed the boundaries of class structure to allow those who were born poor to advance into the upper classes of society. Information is what makes this possible, and that makes it important to remember what information is in an Information Age. In the beginning, information was used as a way to advance one's social status, to become something better than what status that person was born into. Libraries grew in popularity in America during the 19th century as people saw a greater need to educate the entire people. Over the years, we see a shifting role of the library, the "house of information." Not only do libraries contain information, but now also literature for entertainment. As libraries have been seen as a main source of information, this transformation is very important in understanding how information is being perceived in today's world. Within the last decade, we can see an even larger shift in the library to an entertainment-based collection with the introduction of video-cassettes and digital video disks. Technology is one of the key factors in why this change is occurring.

Imagine yourself before the advent of computers, television, and even the telephone. The mode of communication is writing, and letters take some time to be delivered. Time moves slower, almost at a molasses pace. People are overjoyed when a letter is received because one does not hear much from people outside of their household except by visitors and letters. One was considered knowledgeable if one received a letter. Only the literate, a small class of people who had enough money to buy such novelties as books, read. Hence, the information was owned by the wealthy. Even when newspapers began spreading throughout the growing nation, information was directly for the wealthy, for even if the information was available at a small cost, many still could not read. Here, there is a very distinct divide in the social structure: the information-owners and those who worked for those information-owners.

As industrialization progressed and the need for skilled workers increased, it was clear that more information was necessary for the majority of the people as well as for those who could afford it. Among the initiators of this large transfer of information to the public was Rockefeller, who donated millions to begin many public institutions, including libraries. Industrialization had a great affect on how time was perceived and where that time and energy should be focused. From newspapers to the radio, the live broadcast became the newest and latest in information transmission. No longer did people have to wait for the letter to arrive since they could just ring someone and speak to them directly. An age of invention had struck the nation, and it would lead them to television. Until television, visual images were seldom applied in the exchange of information, for up until this point we have the newspapers, books, and radio. The advent of the television would greatly change the way that information was perceived, and turn it once more towards a road of luxury.

One could argue that with the coming of visual information, more information was included in what was being transmitted. People could be judged based on appearance, such as presidential candidates. Today, no one questions this visual information we receive, but we are unconsciously deducing the people we see, judging for ourselves how we want to receive them, to trust them. This information is no longer a luxury; most homes now have at least one television set. It has become a part of our daily lives. Over time, all of these technologies originally divided the people between those who could afford and those who could not afford to receive that information. The Internet is no exception to this divide, but it does divide those people in a different fashion.

The Internet was created by the U.S. military as a precaution under the threat of atomic bombs. It was designed to transmit information in an indestructible fashion. It was to be the beginning of something that would change the role of information and the library almost indefinitely. Nowadays, public libraries are sought out for their entertaining materials more than their information materials. Not only affecting the house of information, the Internet has caused many ripples in society and education. Although many trust the information found in libraries over the information found on the Internet, the affects the Internet has imposed on society and education has inevitably diminished the library's role with the people in the role of the house of information.

Technology is increasing evermore quickly, moving from giant leaps that took many decades and gradually shrinking into baby-steps that occur within even six months. This has caused a lot of social impact on many abstract ideas we have, such as how time is perceived, as well as how we interact in society. Society also demands many new things from us as individuals, as a community, and also as a workforce. Clearly our technology has surpassed us in this respect. Although we are required to know how this technology works and use only the latest technology, rarely is something provided to increase the understanding and education of such technology. This has also had great affects on society, and it has separated people into the information-haves and the information-poor; essentially those who know how to use the technology and those who do not.

The largest change this technology has brought upon us is how we perceive and are able to acquire information. When looking back at the brief history of technology, we are able to see a shift in focus from writing and print, to sound with the coming of the phone and radio, and then to a visual emphasis with the television. Visual learning has been even more emphasized with the Internet that does not only deal with how the images appear on the screen, but the layout of the information to make it most suitable to the user. A key word I would like to emphasize myself is *focus*. Because we are moving from a reading society to a visual-based learning society, our ability to focus has also diminished. Before television, and possibly the radio, a person really had to focus in order to receive the information that was written or printed. Today, news shows will only cover a topic for a maximum of two, possibly three, minutes, a large difference in time devotion based solely on how long the broadcasters are able to keep the audiences' attention. Most stories are not just words as well, but visual images displayed with commentary by the broadcasters. To them, time is never on their side.

Time. Today no one ever has enough of it. We see people running to class or speeding to make it to work on time. Time has become our enemy. If we step back from our present situation, it is easy to see when this became a problem. When industrialization became very popular in America's history, everything was about producing more product in the least amount of time for the biggest profit. This formula was adopted not only by the companies, but also by its workers whose sense of time shifted as their workday labor increased. Technology only helped to push time against our favor. No longer did one have to wait a week or a month to receive a letter from a relative, one could simply lift a receiver, dial the operator, and speak directly to the relative about past and present issues. This was a lot more real than just reading something that happened in the past, and it took a lot less time to develop the information, deliver it, and then consume it at the other end. A month's time was squeezed into a simple hour. That would leave much more time to do whatever

one pleased, but this is not how it ended. More responsibilities and tasks filled that new empty space in the day, bringing not less stress but more. We no longer have the time because we commit ourselves so much to the clock and feeling productive rather than enjoying time and focusing on the quality verses quantity. Therefore, freeing time does not mean the phone conversation to the relative was better than the letter one would have received, and it also took society on another turn in unconscious thought.

Men wore hats, ties, and suits to work while women wore business skirts. Speech to another person always began by addressing that person with a Ms., Mrs., or Mr. Today people are addressed simply by their first name, without any formalities such as designation of marriage status. Not only in these small changes (my grandparents would disagree that these were small) do we see a loss of formality, but in almost every respect. Our interaction with society has reduced greatly in formality, especially since industrialization. People have become much more isolated from each other, and I believe this has helped weaken our respect for other people, hence causing formality to weaken. Formality is based on showing respect to others around you, and having that respect returned. One of the professions that has not been hurt by this wave of informality would be the medical field. We still refer to people as Dr. Smith, etc, while at work and sometimes even outside of work. No longer do we see all employees dressing in formal suits, but many wear casual wear to work, even when working in an office environment. The level of formality in attire has dropped to where it is adequate to wear simply a white shirt and khakis to work. These are only visible outcomes I speak of, but informality crosses several other areas, especially that of language. An increase of vulgar word usage as adjectives to describe virtually anything would send any mother from an earlier era into a frenzy while inserting several bars of soap into that child's mouth. A parents' care towards their family has even grown into such informalities as this or spanking (as this has been seen unfit) would rarely occur.

As aforementioned in the previous paragraph, informalities have bridged into the realm of language. Although linguistics is ever-changing, one could argue that this decade alone has taken us up in a big leap towards informal almost to a point of losing format. People rarely are able to speak in full sentences and often do not pronounce whole words while speaking. Not only a sign of the informal approach we have taken, but also a sign of lost time to fully enunciate the thoughts we are trying to get across to each other. During one of my summers, I took on the duty of tutoring a young man almost in his teen years. He was very intelligent and was able to process information well enough, but I could not, for all that I attempted, get him to use any sort of punctuation in his writing. For a student going into the seventh grade, the task of capitalizing proper nouns and putting periods at the end of each sentence should have been exemplary, especially since he was attending a premiere private preparatory school. Unfortunately, after three months of covering the same grammatical rules, little of his understanding as to how to use them changed. It may be because children are no longer immersed in the literary world as they used to be, or it could be because of this feeling of loss or lack of time interest or focus, but in this example we are able to see just how much we have lost our ability to remember the rules and be able to follow them to allow for a cohesive writing. This is not only a failure in writing, but also in speaking, as I mentioned before. Speaking to my own teenage brother is difficult because he is unable to fully interpret what he is thinking into something that may be communicated with words. If we were able to project one's thoughts as images, he would most likely be able to explain himself very well.

Much of this is because of immersion into a pure visual world. Always being networked so that one may always access the bits of information being sought has narrowed our ability to focus and our ability to communicate that information. We can clearly see that our education and our level of technology is not the same. Because we are always connected, one should have a stronger sense of grammar skills, but it is quite the opposite. When using a tool such as instant messaging that the Internet has provided to us, talking comes in many acronyms. Although I use such acronyms while I speak, they do not replace the sentences that I am trying to get across. This does not hold true for many others who

use resources such as e-mail and instant messaging. An example of this might be something like this: "lol I gtg cu l8r ttyl." Here is it quite distinct that instant messaging has almost brought out a new language of its own. The above message would be translated into "Laugh out loud. I have (got) to go, later. Talk to you later." Of course, this makes more sense, but even if these new acronyms are spelled out, the combination does not even make sense. This is, however, something I see often from someone such as my brother, and even when he does spell things out completely, it is often incorrect, unpunctuated, and incomplete. The use of such materials connects us, however, in a way that all other technology could not.

The ability to communicate regardless of location and time has changed our perception of time among many others. I am required, if I am at work, to be logged in to an instant messenger program so I can be contacted at any time by anyone in my workplace. This is somewhat silly to me because my workplace is not more than one hundred square feet, two stories tall, and has no more than thirty employees working in it. However, many of its employees can now work from home because of technology such as this, and still be able to communicate to someone who is at the workplace or at home working. It is not required that everyone work in one place anymore, greatly due to this ability to always be connected to the network. I also was recently able to test out Macromedia's new Breeze software by taking four online seminars. Essentially what the software is able to do is allow the presenter to set up a program, usually in a PowerPoint presentation, then present it live to an audience via the internet. The program allows for video and sound to be transferred over the Internet, and also allows sound to be transferred via telephone for fidelity. Also in the "window" is a live chat box in which one could send a message to the entire audience or to a specific member. This audience consists of not only people in the state where the conference is taking place, but also people in other states, both next door and across the country. No longer do time zones and financial issues produce a barrier. I was even able to continue working on other projects while listening to the seminar, allowing me to be more productive while the company spent less money. The ability to communicate regardless of anything except having the required technology is becoming more of a reality as technology and the workplace merge.

Unfortunately, the technology to communicate online has negative results as well. We are forced, as Americans, to become more understanding and set aside our differences. Americans have been ridiculed for the few hate crimes or other non-universal ideas that reside here (such as the Ku Klux Klan), even though these countries themselves are not perfect in this respect. This is because America has taken the initiative to push for a wide globalization declaring that our way is the right way. The Internet has not only allowed us to connect globally, but groups that were being forced into the shadows now have an outlet to find people with similar ideals. We cannot tell these people not to post racist, sexist, or any other -ist remark, and so we are viewed by not only what the representative of our nation, the president, says, but also by the people who voice their ideals via the global Internet. In this sense, we have created more responsibility for ourselves and more stress to become the perfect citizen (although I am sure we are all trying to do this already).

These technologies have not only changed our perceptions of time, social relation, language, and other ideas, but they have modified and extended what we include as information. Although many people do not think that entertainment is an actual form of information, some do. We are seeing a shift in the medium information is kept on from paper to more digital conventions. This has affected the "house of information." Although libraries are advancing, albeit at a slower pace than many individuals, many are not keeping up with the need to provide digital information. Digital information also lacks a real house outside of a cold room a server resides in. The access method is via wires and little ons and offs passed through those wires. No longer is the conventional library being wanted as more and more people turn to the Internet to find information. Already organizations, including a few libraries, are completely digitized. This has a great affect on the caretakers of the information that were once only known as librarians.

I believe it is safe to say that technology has definitely changed the way in which we live. Not only in how we are able to find information, but how fast that information is able to get to us. It has led to many adverse effects such as a loss of focus, formality, and linguistic fidelity, and our society has not yet had the ability to develop itself in such a fashion to make up for the lack of education needed to maintain even the basic needs of a society, such as language. It does allow for enhanced communication opportunities, but without a structure to communicate, how great of an achievement is this new communication technology? This is where I believe a librarian's role will come in. We will be the gatekeepers to the information. We will provide people with the language to access the information, and through our interaction with the people, we will teach them how to utilize language. As librarians become more and more the educators of society, librarians must also become more and more computer-literate. I have no doubt that many librarians will be moved into a more technical field of information such as digitizing, so as providers to that information we should also provide the means in which to interpret that information by setting standards in how we communicate it.

Already younger generations are losing out because society has been unable to provide an adequate means to reflect its values, even if the younger generation is attending the same schools that we did. It is therefore becoming the duty of librarians to fill in the missing gap that has been created and aid the learner in any way we can. Some may say a librarian's opportunity to have a career in this day and age is diminishing because of extensive tools found on the Internet such as search engines. I say that librarians will become the facilitators in understanding that information and will help define it. This, of course, means that anyone who was looking at being that old, cranky, stereotypical librarian hushing all those talking would probably be best off in seeking a very rural location upon graduation, for more and more the interconnectedness of our society is forcing the traditional library setting to become one with the technologies of tomorrow.

One may wonder if technology has played a positive role in how people perceive the world around them. Our society is in a time of great transition, and I believe that society will be able to adjust education to make up for what it is now lacking. Right now our younger generation may seem almost at peril of losing what might be most important -- their memory. With a lack of focus and ability to keep attention, the fashion in which one remembers, mostly visual nowadays, needs to be solidified and enhanced, just as our technology is constantly being enhanced. Without the ability to remember, having the technology to perform duties needed based on an older society's abilities has no purpose. The librarian should therefore become the mnemonic device that strengthens the memory of the youth by upholding society's values in language, time, and structure while they interact with society.